



Philip Morris representative visits Maysville

By MISTY MAYNARD

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Philip Morris USA representative David Sutton travelled through Kentucky Wednesday to meet with local media and discuss some of the current issues facing the tobacco industry, from an increase in tobacco production to the company's stand on smoking bans.

One of the stops during his trip was in Maysville, where Sutton discussed the evolution of the tobacco industry from the federally regulated quota system, the ensuing tobacco buyout, and the current state of the tobacco industry as a free market.

While tobacco production decreased around 2005, it now seems on the rebound, with an increase in production nationally, as well as on the state level, Sutton said. Nearly 107,000 acres of burley tobacco are projected for the U.S. for the current crop year -- 77,000 of which will come from Kentucky.

"Kentucky is a very, very significant burley producer," said Sutton. "Obviously, the tobacco grower relationship is very important to us."

Sutton said Philip Morris created a Tobacco Farmer Partnering Program in 2000 to establish direct relationships with farmers, and also offers assistance to farmers through a cost-sharing program which offers reimbursement incentives for farmers who may need to make some kind of investment.



Philip Morris representative David Sutton.

During a time when cigarette consumption is diminishing and smoking bans are becoming increasingly popular, Sutton said Philip Morris has expanded its demand for tobacco through the production of two smokeless tobacco products now being tested. The products are smokeless and spitless, Sutton said, and join the ranks of products from other companies.

While the cigarette industry realizes a decline of about 2 percent each year, Sutton said the smokeless tobacco business has been growing by 6 to 8 percent each year.

Smokeless tobacco should not be considered a "safe alternative" to smoking, the Centers for Disease Control warns. "Spit tobacco contains nicotine, which is highly addictive. Whether the tobacco is chewed, absorbed through the cheeks and gums, or through other skin tissue, within about 20 minutes the nicotine can cause increased heart (pulse) rate and blood pressure, and decreased appetite, putting unnecessary stress on the heart. Nicotine can also cause feelings of stimulation or increased alertness - one "dip" is equal to 3 or 4 cigarettes," the CDC Web site says. "The health consequences range from halitosis (bad breath) and stained teeth, to tissue deterioration and sores in the mouth and the gums, to severe health problems (such as various forms of oral cancer)."

Though Philip Morris places great emphasis on youth smoking prevention programs -- including the "We Card" program it supports -- Sutton said when it comes to smoking bans, the company believes the decision should be

left up to private business owners.

In places where the public must go -- such as government buildings and airports -- as well as locations where children are often found, Sutton said a ban is warranted. However, bars, restaurants and other private businesses should be able to decide, Sutton said.

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